

BI

- (i) to disable the telephone ringer, and
- (ii) to enable the recording device such that the recording device may play back said instruction recording to a calling party, the controller being operable after a calling party provides said designated signal to initiate an emergency sequence and re-enable the ringer when said signal from the calling party indicates that the calling party's call is a priority call.

53. (Amended) The apparatus according to Claim 52, wherein the recording prompts the calling party to speak a designated command to indicate that the call is a priority call, the controller being operable to recognize said spoken designated command such that said emergency sequence is initiated.

-- 56. Apparatus operable with a telephone including a ringer and a telephone answering device (TAD), comprising:

B2

- (i) a controller adapted for connection with said telephone and said TAD for selectively disabling the telephone ringer and connecting the TAD to receive the call and to deliver a playback message to the caller with instruction for the caller to override the ringer disablement so that the telephone will ring if said call is a priority call,

- (ii) said TAD adapted to provide an instruction to the caller to use his/her telephone key pad or to speak into his phone microphone a designated code indicating that the calling party's call is a priority call,

said controller, when it receives said code, adapted to override said disablement of said ringer and allow said call to activate said ringer so that

the call can be received,

(iii) a timing device electronically coupled to said controller and operable to produce a first signal indicative of a preselected timing condition (such as 11:00 PM turn off time) for which said controller is to automatically disable said ringer and enable the TAD for providing its instruction playback, and

(iv) a light sensing device electronically coupled to said controller and operable to produce a second signal indicative of a preselected level of ambient light (such as lights out or darkness condition) for which said controller is to automatically disable said ringer and enable the TAD for providing its instruction playback,

said controller adapted for the following conditions:

32
(a) where said timing device is activated and said light sensing device is not activated, to receive and respond to said first signal from said timing device and to disable said ringer, or

(b) where said light sensing device is activated and said timing device is not activated, to receive and respond to said second signal from said light sensing device and to disable said ringer, or

(c) where both said timing device and said light sensing device are activated, to receive said first signal (such as 11:00PM turn off time) and to disable said ringer, but to disregard said first signal if the second signal (such as lights out or darkness condition) is not yet been received, or

(d) where both said timing device and said light sensing device are activated, to receive said second signal (such as lights out or darkness

condition) and to disable said ringer, but to disregard said second signal if said first signal has not yet been received, or

(e) where neither said timing device nor said light sensing device is activated, to respond to manual switching to disable said ringer.

57. A telephone answering system, comprising:

- (i) a telephone including a ringer,
- (ii) a telephone answering device (TAD), and
- (iii) a controller adapted for connection with said telephone and said

TAD for selectively disabling the telephone ringer and connecting the TAD to receive the call and to deliver a playback message to the caller with instruction for the caller to override the ringer disablement so that the telephone will ring if said call is a priority call,

said TAD adapted to provide an instruction to the caller to use his/her telephone key pad or to speak into his phone microphone a designated code indicating that the calling party's call is a priority call,

said controller, when it receives said code, adapted to override said disablement of said ringer and allow said call to activate said ringer so that the call can be received,

(iv) a timing device electronically coupled to said controller and operable to produce a first signal indicative of a preselected timing condition (such as 11:00 PM turn off time) for which said controller is to automatically disable said ringer and enable the TAD for providing its instruction playback, and

(v) a light sensing device electronically coupled to said controller and operable to produce a second signal indicative of a preselected level of ambient light (such as lights out darkness condition) for which said controller is to automatically disable said ringer and enable the TAD for providing its instruction playback,

said controller adapted for the following conditions:

(a) where said timing device is activated and said light sensing device is not activated, to receive and respond to said first signal from said timing device,

or

(b) where said light sensing device is activated and said timing device is not activated, to receive and respond to said second signal from said light sensing device, or

(c) where both said timing device and said light sensing device are activated, to receive said first signal (such as 11:00PM turn off time) and to disable said ringer, but to disregard said first signal if the second signal (such as lights out or darkness condition) is not yet been received, or

(d) where both said timing device and said light sensing device are activated, to receive said second signal (such as lights out or darkness condition) electronically coupled to said controller and to disregard said second signal if said first signal has not yet been received, or

(e) where neither said timing device nor said light sensing device is activated, to respond to manual switching to disable said rings.